Characters

- The Professor
- The Female Student
- The Male Student
- Gnomes

Act

Scene

A large room with pink walls, a kind of classroom perhaps, with many blackboards on the walls. But there are also eccentrically painted gray shapes, suggesting large inkblots evoking memories of animals or strange geographical continents, and black horizontal lines of varying thickness, which give an added Egyptian-like texture to the walls. Here and there tall bookcases reach to the ceiling. Roses creep up the walls and around corners, and tiny flags of no specific nature are hung here and there. At the rear of the stage is a long railing, a foot downstage of the rear wall, much like an exercise bar in a dance studio. From the ceiling hangs a double-faced head, which revolves slowly throughout the play. There are some small carpets, defining areas of action, and some thin red poles with lights on top. It is a lecture room, but it is also a laboratory, or a studio, or a gymnasium — all at once.

The play begins as piano music repeating a short childlike phrase is heard over what sounds like chattering crickets. Everyone who speaks wears a radio microphone on a headset, enabling them to speak softly and intimately throughout the play. The music — repeating loops made from brief musical phrases — continues through all moments of the play, ever changing, ever returning, giving musical underscoring to all the dialogue and occasionally rising in volume to punctuate a dance or a complex manipulation of objects.

Four gnomelike creatures with red hair, tall caps, beards, and eyeglasses appear on tiptoe. They creep onto the stage and go to different points in the room, from which they each pull a white dotted string from retractable spring devices that keep all the strings taut. At the end of each string is asmall rubber ball, and the gnomes crouch down and dangle the balls over seemingly random spots on the floor. At the same time, the ***FEMALE STUDENT*** *enters, a young woman with long dark hair, ankle-high socks, and a beret. She sets down a briefcase and puts on a pair of white gloves. At the same time, the* ***PROFESSOR*** *enters. He is a burly man in a soiled white shirt with the sleeves rolled up past the elbows. He wears a thick, studded belt. On his head he wears a tightfitting white bandanna, and over what look like motorcycle pants he wears athletic knee pads. His face is covered with many small scratches, and he seems to resemble a member of a motorcycle gang as much as a distinguished professor. He stops as he enters the room, seemingly hypnotized by a single white glove that lies carefully spread out on a white cloth that has been laid on the floor directly in his path.*

FEMALE STUDENT

Okay, Mr˙ Professor —

(With a tiny yelp of pleasure, the ***GNOMES*** *all fall to the floor, still holding their strings. The* ***PROFESSOR*** *turns to study them. Then he circles back to the glove, bends down, and puts it on)*

Are you as weird as I think you are?

PROFESSOR

(Turning slowly to confront her)

Not likely.

*(The music rises, accompanied by a voice chattering rapid gibberish. The **MALE STUDENT** runs on suddenly and the **PROFESSOR** whirls to face him. The **MALE STUDENT** is dressed in knickers, carries a briefcase, and on his head sports an army fatigue cap. The **PROFESSOR** runs from him to the **FEMALE STUDENT**, who stamps down on his foot, and the **PROFESSOR** yowls in pain and runs to one of the blackboards and begins to erase — though there is nothing to erase — and the **MALE STUDENT** follows him to the blackboard to observe, whereupon the **PROFESSOR** drops his eraser and slams himself with his back against the blackboard to watch for a further attack. During this the **GNOMES** have retracted their strings, and now all squat at the rear wall, holding the exercise bar, and the music is quiet again)*

FEMALE STUDENT

Disturbed? You hear voices, Professor?

PROFESSOR

I'm lucky that way.

(He takes a few steps, and she shadows his move)

FEMALE STUDENT

I'd say, weird.

PROFESSOR

I feel connected.

FEMALE STUDENT

Connected to what?

PROFESSOR

(As both students stalk him)

To the source of my voices.

FEMALE STUDENT

Okay. That's weird.

PROFESSOR

. . . Are you weird, or am I weird?

FEMALE STUDENT

What's the criteria?

*(Three of the **GNOMES** run forward, each carrying a tray with a small printed card. The **PROFESSOR** and the **STUDENTS** each pick up a card, glance at it, and toss it to the floor, whereupon the **GNOMES** retrieve the cards and go back to the exercise bar)*

PROFESSOR

(Addressing the female student)

Let me invite you —

(He takes an apple from a bookcase and holds it out to her)

Come a little closer.

FEMALE STUDENT

In what sense, Professor?

(She runs to him carrying a rope, and quickly entangles him with one hand behind his back)

MALE STUDENT

The question is: what can he do with one hand tied behind his back?

*(The **PROFESSOR** unwinds himself as the **GNOMES** exit, and he proceeds to erase the already erased blackboard, as the **FEMALE STUDENT** goes and lies down on one of the tiny carpets. The **PROFESSOR** stops, and as the **MALE STUDENT** goes down on all fours to crawl toward the **FEMALE STUDENT**, the **PROFESSOR** also sinks to the floor)*

PROFESSOR

My secret desire is — win love from many beautiful women.

FEMALE STUDENT

(Propped up on an elbow to look at him)

I'll pretend I didn't hear that sentiment, Professor.

PROFESSOR

I'm speaking of things closest to my heart, madam.

*(The four **GNOMES** run in with long silver wands and take positions around the **FEMALE STUDENT**, using the wands to point at a watch on her wrist)*

MALE STUDENT

Notice what's on her wrist, Professor?

*(In slow motion, the **GNOMES** fall to the floor)*

PROFESSOR

A very beautiful watch.

*(As soft organ music begins and **GNOMES** retire)*

MALE STUDENT

Hey — who do YOU pray to, Professor?

PROFESSOR

I don't.

MALE STUDENT

What kind of religious ceremony?

PROFESSOR

I don't have any religious observations.

MALE STUDENT

God plays no part in your life?

PROFESSOR

None at all.

MALE STUDENT

There is no God in your life, Professor?

PROFESSOR

None at all.

*(Suddenly, one of the **GNOMES** rolls a cabinet into the room at great speed. It comes to an abrupt stop. Displayed in the cabinet is a violin)*

FEMALE STUDENT

What a beautiful violin, Professor.

MALE STUDENT

(As if experiencing a vision)

My God —

FEMALE STUDENT

Do you play it?

PROFESSOR

I scratch out noise.

FEMALE STUDENT

I'll bet you play better than that, Professor.

PROFESSOR

I scratch out terrible noises, which I like doing in private.

FEMALE STUDENT

You're saying that just to provoke me, Professor.

PROFESSOR

Not at all.

*(An electronic tone rises, and the **PROFESSOR** and the **MALE STUDENT** put hands to their foreheads, moan, and fall to the floor, as the **FEMALE STUDENT** crosses and pulls the violin from the cabinet. She studies it in her hands, as the **PROFESSOR** and **MALE STUDENT** recover and run from the room. Just at that moment, the **GNOMES** run in and snatch the violin from the **FEMALE STUDENT** and run out of the room with it. She chases after them, and the **PROFESSOR** and **MALE STUDENT** reappear and join the chase. Then, alone together, the three embrace one another despondently. Each kisses his own right hand, and three **GNOMES** sneak back into the room and go to pull the strings from the wall. The **PROFESSOR** and his **STUDENTS** have been caressing their own face with their kissed hand. But when they see the **GNOMES***

dangling the rubber balls at the end of the strings, each goes slowly on tiptoe to one of the balls, to take a position leaning ecstatically against a wall with a ball now placed close to each of their bodies. The tone is very loud, and the three of them stare up into space, pointing one finger to their foreheads)

FEMALE STUDENT

(As the tone softens)

What does your internal time say now, Professor?

PROFESSOR

It doesn't speak to me, it manipulates me in other ways.

FEMALE STUDENT

Okay, Professor.

(They all leave their positions)

Imagine a completely different play called . . .

(She tries to think, then comes up with a title)

"Fingers Alert." What could happen in such a play?

*(The tone rises again, and while the two men cover their ears, the **FEMALE STUDENT** runs to the blackboard and runs her fingernails down its surface. Then everyone runs to new positions as the music changes. The **FEMALE STUDENT** has her back to the room. The two men sneak toward her and one softly whispers "Cookoo!," which makes her whirl in irritation. She picks up a metal dog leash from the floor, bending over provocatively, then turning to threaten the men, who are muttering happily to themselves — "I guess we showed her a thing or two")*

FEMALE STUDENT

Imagine a play called "Dogs on Duty."

*(The two men take a step back and growl, and then reach for books high on the bookcase, but unable to control the books, a few tumble to the floor, as the **FEMALE STUDENT** is gliding about the room, trailing a dog leash on the floor behind her provocatively)*

What could happen in such a play?

*(Disco music rises as she circles the room. The **GNOMES** arrive with plates carrying cards that are again read and tossed away. One **GNOME** places a chair wrapped*

*in brown paper on the little carpet, and then the **GNOMES** go to the rear and rest on the exercise bar. The **PROFESSOR** has acquired another apple, which he holds out toward the **FEMALE STUDENT**)*

PROFESSOR

Did you ever see this in real life, madam?

FEMALE STUDENT

(She approaches it slowly to study it)

An apple!

*(She and the **GNOMES** and the **MALE STUDENT** form a line, and they all cover their eyes)*

PROFESSOR

(Re-presenting the apple)

Remember? Did you ever see this in real life?

*(Everyone in line slowly looks toward the **MALE STUDENT**, who covers his private parts with his hands, and all but he and the **FEMALE STUDENT** slowly fall to the floor as the childlike piano tune returns. Then the **FEMALE STUDENT** grabs the chair wrapped in paper and pulls it noisily from the room as the **GNOMES** rise and run out after her. The **MALE STUDENT** comes down to watch the **PROFESSOR** erase the already erased blackboard. Then he begins erasing one right next to it. The **PROFESSOR** is jealous and pushes him away and starts erasing on this other blackboard. The **MALE STUDENT** tries again, and as the **PROFESSOR** reinvades his blackboard, he gives up. The **PROFESSOR** stops and studies the **MALE STUDENT**)*

PROFESSOR

You just lied to me.

MALE STUDENT

I don't lie, I don't tell the truth. I'm here to do neither of those two stupid things.

PROFESSOR

What are you here for, sir?

MALE STUDENT

To be slippery on things, Professor.

*(He twists his legs and mockingly pretends to slip, falling to the ground with a shriek that turns into a laugh as the **PROFESSOR** runs*

across the room, opens a briefcase, and pulls out a stack of papers)

PROFESSOR

Well, here's what I'm here for.

*(He starts throwing individual pieces of paper into the air, and as they flutter to the floor, the **GNOMES** run in and collect them and run to the walls to hold the sheets of paper high up on the walls)*

I want to be in a place from which truth —

(He whirls ecstatically and runs across the room, only to have an accident — he bumps into the wall and cries out in pain as he holds his damaged nose)

Ow! Now we have a problem. Truth: gushes forth.

*(The **MALE STUDENT** barks twice, breaking the mood as the **GNOMES** turn from the wall to watch)*

I want to be a place THROUGH which truth —

*(The **GNOMES** run from the room, clutching their papers as the **MALE STUDENT** barks again)*

I want to be a place through which truth passes.

*(He has come and captured the **MALE STUDENT** in a headlock, but the student immediately escapes)*

But when it passes through ME — stripping off its protective cloak — Ah, but why do I wear my protective cloak? Because truth revealed, believe it or not, takes the unfortunate shape of everything that isn't true.

*(He crosses to the **MALE STUDENT**, who is now erasing one of the blackboards already erased)*

This happens! THIS REALLY HAPPENS!

*(As the **MALE STUDENT** turns to face him, the **PROFESSOR** turns away sadly)*

But if mere actors speak this, then it no longer happens.

MALE STUDENT

(Inspired to imitate his professor)

Me too. I want to be, a place through which truth passes.

(He goes to take down a book)

Did I get that right, Professor?

(He bounces gently across the room, singing a scale to himself. Then turns a page and finds the passage he was looking for and reads)

"I want to be a place through which . . . truth

passes."

*(The **FEMALE STUDENT** is crossing behind them, studying an apple she holds in her hand)*

PROFESSOR

Turn the page.

MALE STUDENT

(Ecstatically hugging the book to his chest)

I'd like to linger a bit longer over this very particular page.

PROFESSOR

Turn the page.

MALE STUDENT

(As he does so)

What does it say on this page, Professor?

PROFESSOR

Wait a minute —

*(He crosses to the **MALE STUDENT**, momentarily distracted by a big pink disk that rolls in behind him, manipulated from behind by a **GNOME**. Then he recovers his composure, and goes to whisper to the student)*

That's my line.

(Grabs the book away and reads)

"What does it say on this page?"

MALE STUDENT

"Eat me"?

PROFESSOR

Please?

*(He checks the book, sees no such line, and hands the book back to the **MALE STUDENT**, who proceeds to tear a page out of the book and, with a flourish, eats it)*

By the way, Professor —

*(The **FEMALE STUDENT** comes rushing forward to present the apple to the **PROFESSOR**, who scurries out of the way and runs to fall back ecstatically against a wall, as a **GNOME** pulls a string from the wall to hold on the **PROFESSOR'S** knee, and the **MALE STUDENT** retreats to pose spreadeagled against the pink disk at the rear of the room, continuing all the while to chew the page torn from the book)*

— do I consider you a place through which truth passes? You'll never know, Professor, because you can't get inside my head.

(He turns away)

Let's make a guess —

FEMALE STUDENT

(Running forward)

What's a guess?

PROFESSOR

Somebody should write this down so I don't forget.

(He whirls away to find a piece of paper, but miscalculates and bangs against the wall)

Jesus Christ —!

(Holding his head, he realizes the collision was very stimulating)

— this is the most interesting thought I've had in a long time. What's a guess?

MALE STUDENT

*(Immediately copying his **PROFESSOR**, he comes and bangs against the same wall)*

Jesus Christ —!

(He spits out the paper he has been chewing and holds his stomach)

— this is the most interesting meal I've had in a long time. What's a guess?

PROFESSOR

Do you think I can make this lady disappear?

(He gives the disk a shove and it rolls out of the room)

FEMALE STUDENT

I do hope somebody gets hurt.

PROFESSOR

Why?

MALE STUDENT

Hey, do you know the name of every book in your oh-so-extensive library, Professor?

PROFESSOR

I believe I do.

FEMALE STUDENT

I doubt it.

MALE STUDENT

Close your eyes, Professor. Then feel your way to the bookcase. Take out a book without looking.

*(In trying to do so, the **PROFESSOR** again bangs into a wall. But as he recovers from the collision, the **GNOMES** arrive to offer a white cloth to the **STUDENTS** and the **PROFESSOR**. They each take one and hold it in front of their eyes as they take three tentative steps forward. Then as the music rises, the **GNOMES** steal the cloths and run from the room, as the **PROFESSOR** and the **STUDENTS** spin dizzily. As they spin, the rolling cabinet has reentered)*

MALE STUDENT

As you can clearly see —

PROFESSOR

Where?

MALE STUDENT

*(Holding his forehead as the **FEMALE STUDENT** takes an envelope from the cabinet)*

I already wrote the name of the book I predicted you'd pick, and sealed my guess in a white envelope.

FEMALE STUDENT

(Opening the envelope and reading)

It's titled —

*(She looks up at the **PROFESSOR**)*

— you're not going to believe this.

MALE STUDENT

Oh, I believe it.

FEMALE STUDENT

"Dossier of Fear."

PROFESSOR

I have no such book in my entire library.

MALE STUDENT

Hey, look again.

*(He collapses to the floor as the **PROFESSOR** runs to the cabinet, and the **FEMALE STUDENT** tears the envelope to pieces and throws the pieces into the air)*

PROFESSOR

(Looking at a book he has taken from the cabinet)

You're quite right. The book is entitled "Dossier of Fear." But I'm convinced that heretofore I had no such book.

(He leafs through it)

Its pages are all blank pages.

*(A **GNOME** snatches the book from the **PROFESSOR** and runs out of the room)*

MALE STUDENT

I could have secretly hidden that book in your collection. Isn't that possible, Professor?

PROFESSOR

Would you do that?

MALE STUDENT

Well, imagine a play entitled "Broken Promises."

*(The **GNOMES** run in with red apples on dinner plates and place them on the floor, as choral music rises. The **PROFESSOR** and **STUDENTS** each take a rubber mat from a shelf, spread it on the floor, and vigorously wipe their feet on it, grunting in accompaniment. Then they put away the mats, and the **PROFESSOR** seizes a large shapeless object wrapped in brown paper, which he holds out toward the **FEMALE STUDENT**, who has run to the exercise bar, where she swings her lower leg in a circular propeller motion. The **MALE STUDENT** grabs the object from the **PROFESSOR** and hides it in the bookcase as the **PROFESSOR** runs to observe the **FEMALE STUDENT** from another angle. She immediately stops)*

MALE STUDENT

Welcome. Let me tell you a story in the center of which I hide a very personal message.

FEMALE STUDENT

Excuse me but — how will we be able to recognize such a private message?

MALE STUDENT

Well . . .

(He reaches out toward the plates with apples, and the two others do likewise)

Imagine a play —

*(As the music rises, all three grunt and lurch in place toward the apples. The **GNOMES** run in to grab the plates and apples, and run out of the room banging the plates together, making a noise that causes the **PROFESSOR** and **STUDENTS** to hold their ears and howl in pain. They race to the bookcases, and each grabs two plates with handles on the bottom, enabling them to be held like orchestra cymbals. The music stops, and they awkwardly hold the cymbal plates, looking at one another. Then they slowly hide them behind their backs. The **FEMALE STUDENT**, especially embarrassed, runs from the room, and the **PROFESSOR** takes a few steps after her, to watch her exit. The **MALE STUDENT** has begun to erase an already erased blackboard, and the **PROFESSOR** turns to address him)*

PROFESSOR

There might be enough time here to explain something.

MALE STUDENT

What?

PROFESSOR

Did you ever heretofore explode, Professor?

MALE STUDENT

Is this called talking to myself?

(They retake the cymbal plates, and as choral music rises, each runs to a wall, smacks the plates high up against the wall, and holding them against the wall, revolve their hips three times, grunting in rhythm. Then they whirl to face each other)

PROFESSOR

Try using my real name.

MALE STUDENT

I don't think names are a real issue, vis-à-vis a man who wants to genuinely explode.

PROFESSOR

On the verge?

MALE STUDENT

Hey, why not take me up on that?

*(The childlike piano tune returns, as a **GNOME** rolls in a wooden cart in which the **FEMALE STUDENT** is*

*riding, as another **GNOME** wheels in a white folding hospital screen, which the **PROFESSOR** studies for a moment, then folds about himself so he is hidden inside. By this time the **MALE STUDENT** is bent over holding onto the railing of the cart, and the **FEMALE STUDENT** hits him three times with a riding crop. He cries out in pain and runs away.)*

PROFESSOR

(Inside the screen, softly)

"When stones are shoes, the bottoms of the feet go deaf."

MALE STUDENT

Do I have your permission, at least, to get torn to pieces by contradictory forces?

PROFESSOR

(Opening the screen)

Of course you have my permission.

*(The **FEMALE STUDENT** reenters with a large stuffed horse, which she transfers to the **MALE STUDENT**, who lets it fall to the ground at his feet. A **VOICE** is heard on tape, repeating the phrase "Remarkable people never depend on self-revelation." The repeated phrase is joined by organ music as the **MALE STUDENT** picks up the horse and lifts it over his shoulders, its legs hanging down along each side of his neck. At the same time, the **PROFESSOR** places an apple at the **MALE STUDENT'S** feet, and the **PROFESSOR** and the **GNOMES** stand in a semicircle around the apple, pointing to it with silver wands)*

MALE STUDENT

I was hoping you'd offer me a handkerchief.

PROFESSOR

Why of all things a handkerchief?

MALE STUDENT

Can't you guess?

*(He slowly revolves in place, as the **PROFESSOR** and the **GNOMES** slowly fall to the floor, with wands still pointing toward the apple)*

A handkerchief to stop the bleeding.

PROFESSOR

(From the floor)

From which wound, pal?

MALE STUDENT

Ah, some of them can't be reached. So I'll have to try this one conveniently here in the palm of my hand.

FEMALE STUDENT

Imagine a play called "The Pretend Hat."

(She takes a man's felt hat from a bookcase and places it on her head)

What could happen in such a play?

PROFESSOR

That's a very, very old wound, madam.

MALE STUDENT

I was hoping you'd offer me a coat.

PROFESSOR

Ah, hearts of ice.

MALE STUDENT

(Smiling, he looks upward, as lively music begins to filter into the room)

Oh, Professor, you remembered.

PROFESSOR

(Hearing the music, his hands travel up as if he were going to perform an exotic belly dance. His hips sway with the beat)

I remember nothing, pal, I just . . .

(The music is loud now, and he has to shout)

IGO, with the FLOW —

*(To very aggressive, marchlike jazz music, **PROFESSOR** and **MALE STUDENT** do a strange dance where they grunt to the beat, pumping their arms like suction pumps, then strutting around the stage doing an exaggerated breast stroke, then standing in place again, grunting and working their arms. Perhaps it's the memory of a bizarre military career. The **GNOMES** have appeared in the entrance to cheer them on, but a moment later the **GNOMES** are racing for the horse, which was dropped as the dance began. They lift it high in the air and run with it to one of the blackboards. As they rub its nose into the blackboard, both the **PROFESSOR** and the **MALE STUDENT** rush to the same blackboard and begin erasing. The **GNOMES** drop the horse and pull it by its legs to the other side of the room. In the rear, the **FEMALE STUDENT** has reentered pulling the cart, which now has a large wooden chair loaded in it upside down. She comes to a stop and watches. She is wearing a graduation robe and cap with tassel. The **GNOMES** run from the room, and the music turns quiet and threatening. The two at the blackboard sense her presence and stop erasing, but they don't want to look at her)*

FEMALE STUDENT

(Smiling, looking straight ahead)

Thank you, Professor.

PROFESSOR

For what?

*(He and the **MALE STUDENT** go back to erasing)*

FEMALE STUDENT

I'm thrilled to be included.

PROFESSOR AND MALE STUDENT

(They stop and look at each other)

In what?

FEMALE STUDENT

By the way, Professor Number Four . . .?

*(She holds out a set of car keys and rattles them. The **PROFESSOR** and the **MALE STUDENT** race to separate bookcases, pour themselves a shot of liquor, and toss it down in one gulp)*

PROFESSOR

(Gasping for breath after the drink)

I needed that.

MALE STUDENT

(Gasping)

I needed that too.

FEMALE STUDENT

— is still parking the car.

PROFESSOR

Parking the car?

MALE STUDENT

Then we could get rid of the horse.

FEMALE STUDENT

What horse?

PROFESSOR

Better not.

MALE STUDENT

Why not?

*(They both take another stiff shot. Then the **PROFESSOR** comes up behind the **FEMALE STUDENT** and smiles sweetly)*

PROFESSOR

Have a seat.

(He looks about quickly, and is embarrassed to see there is no chair, so runs back for another shot)

FEMALE STUDENT

Hello again, Professor.

PROFESSOR

Where's Professor Number Four?

MALE STUDENT

That's been covered.

PROFESSOR

With what?

FEMALE STUDENT

Parking the car, Professor.

PROFESSOR

Parking the car.

MALE STUDENT

(To himself, amazed)

I knew it, I knew it —

PROFESSOR

(Racing to the female student)

Have a seat.

FEMALE STUDENT

(Hesitating, with just a hint of seductiveness, she begins taking off her cap and gown)

I already did.

*(A tone rises as the **PROFESSOR** and the **MALE STUDENT** slowly fall to the floor muttering to themselves, "Oh, yeah," overcome by her partial disrobing. A **GNOME** comes to take the chair from the cart, setting it on one of the small carpets, as the **PROFESSOR** struggles to his feet, holding his head)*

PROFESSOR

It must be that something powerful happened to me. I heard this very desirable woman say out loud to me, "I already did."

FEMALE STUDENT

But I already do.

PROFESSOR

Vis-à-vis, you know —

MALE STUDENT

Horses!

PROFESSOR

No. Chairs.

*(Music is rising that evokes the image of many **GNOMES** busily scurrying through the city)*

I wanted those words to be magically invested with something powerful enough to throw me to the floor.

FEMALE STUDENT

I did.

PROFESSOR

I tried to make it happen.

FEMALE STUDENT

*(She approaches the **PROFESSOR**)*

I did.

*(She hits the **PROFESSOR** and he falls to the floor. The **GNOMES** appear*

*and accompany the fall with a "Wheee!" of excitement. Then she approaches the **MALE STUDENT**)*

I did.

*(She hits him, and he also falls, accompanied by a "Whee!" from the **GNOMES**. Then the **GNOMES** rush forward and help the two on the floor to rise, and they do a whirling dance with the **PROFESSOR** and his **STUDENTS**. The **PROFESSOR** shouts out over the dance —)*

PROFESSOR

I remember I said, "Where's Professor Number Four?" And you said, "Parking the car, parking the car, parking the car — which might take a very long time!"

*(The dance music stops and the **GNOMES** run from the room)*

MALE STUDENT

Hey, how long?

FEMALE STUDENT

(After a pause)

A very long time.

PROFESSOR

What's the estimate of a very long time?

(Ominous music begins softly, and everybody finds a new corner of the room in which to feel more secure)

FEMALE STUDENT

Let's just say — time doesn't exist for me.

*(As the cabinet rolls into the room, the **MALE STUDENT** puts on a dunce cap, and the **PROFESSOR** takes a rolled-up chart out of the cabinet, waits for a moment, then lets it unroll dramatically to show a brightly colored selection of automobiles painted on the chart. There is a pause while the two **STUDENTS** try to make sense of it)*

MALE STUDENT

Okay. Something about a horse —

PROFESSOR

Wrong.

(Then he thinks)

But that should work —

FEMALE STUDENT

Why should it work if it's wrong, Professor?

(She thinks)

Unless, the key is more interesting than the lock?

PROFESSOR

(Cocking his head to one side)

Well —

FEMALE STUDENT

Shit — that can't be right.

*(The music rises as the **PROFESSOR** runs to hang the chart on the wall, but he reverses it so the other side is now revealed. Instead of late-model automobiles, the other side is illustrated with full-color pictures of prime cuts of meat. All three run to different shelves to pour themselves a drink, but at the last minute, they stop themselves and slap the offending hand reaching for the bottle. They look at the hand for a minute, then shrug and pour themselves a drink anyway. They gasp as it goes down the throat)*

PROFESSOR

(Stepping forward to watch their reactions to the liquor)

No problem.

(He circles back to lean nonchalantly against a bookcase)

Here's another way to look at it. What is a human being — except — that which —

*(The **MALE STUDENT** is staring at the meat chart)*

— dig deep enough now: "Doesn't know."

MALE & FEMALE STUDENT

(Enlightened, they hit their own foreheads)

Ahhhhh!

PROFESSOR

Animals, for instance — zebras, lions, buffalos —

*(Startled, they turn to watch a white screen zip in behind them to stand against the rear wall, a **GNOME** behind it. Then the **PROFESSOR** recovers, and slowly approaches the **FEMALE STUDENT**)*

and more ordinary things like dogs and cats.

(She hasn't been looking at him, but he whirls her around, threateningly. Then he turns from her and picks up the horse, which is still lying on the ground. He carries the horse and stands holding it, as if posing for a photo against the white screen at the rear of the room)

None of those animal things are in a state of not-knowing, because the issue never arises. So a human being is the birth of not-knowing as a real possibility. And when that benificent stupidity is ended?

(He steps forward with the horse. Then

he drops it on the floor and returns alone to the white screen)

Then in fact —

(The large pink disk rolls in front of him, and he speaks, hidden behind it)

— he, or she, is no longer a human being.

*(The disk rolls quickly out of the room, revealing the **PROFESSOR** facing the white screen with his back to the room. As he takes a few steps backwards, the white screen moves to the side and tilts at a slight angle. The **PROFESSOR** turns back to speak to the room, whispering and slowly kneeling on the collapsed horse)*

Maybe that's why Professor Number Four is taking such a goddamned eternity to park the goddamned automobile.

FEMALE STUDENT

Look, you're into something —

(The white screen whisks off)

I'm just not into, Professor.

*(There is a pause. The **PROFESSOR** looks disoriented)*

MALE STUDENT

Hey, that seems to quiet him down to a considerable extent.

PROFESSOR

I wondered who was going to be the first to say something.

(Looks from one to the other)

What do you know, it was me.

FEMALE STUDENT

You almost said something important, Professor, but it wasn't you.

PROFESSOR

Didn't I speak first?

FEMALE STUDENT

No.

PROFESSOR

Who did?

(A Bach-like phrase of music is rising)

MALE STUDENT

I'll have to go into the next room, but I think —

(He points to himself)

"If you go —

*(With his other hand, he points to the **PROFESSOR**)*

— I go."

PROFESSOR

Really?

MALE STUDENT

Yes.

(They all run for a set of cymbal plates with handles, and smack them high up on the wall)

FEMALE STUDENT

(Calling over her shoulder)

What time is it?

PROFESSOR

My watch stopped!

(He runs out of the room. The two others relax to watch him go)

FEMALE STUDENT

*(To the **MALE STUDENT**)*

Think about this, Professor. If God himself were to come into this room right now . . .

(She thinks, then turns and places her cymbal plates against his, and with a slight push, sends him spinning from the room. Alone, she faces forward)

It would mean time had indeed stopped.

(She bangs her two plates together and rubs them against each other)

PROFESSOR

(Offstage, using a Godlike intonation)

God?

FEMALE STUDENT

(Putting away her plates)

I'm not interested.

PROFESSOR

*(As the **MALE STUDENT** is pushed onstage, wearing a white feather headdress)*

You have to be interested.

(He himself appears, wearing a white feather headdress that is much more impressive than his student's)

FEMALE STUDENT

My God, that's desperation on your part, Professor.

PROFESSOR

Not on my part.

MALE STUDENT

Not on my part, Professor.

(He covers his eyes and tiptoes to a corner, as the others try to hide. It's a game of blindman's buff. The voice on tape is again heard repeating over and over, "Remarkable people never depend on self-revelation")

PROFESSOR

1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10.

(He turns from his corner, looks up to the heavens, and starts to spin in place)

Now, if God, really —

FEMALE STUDENT

Oh, that's vulgar, Professor, and so pretentious, it's doubly vulgar.

MALE STUDENT

(Shrugging)

Now me —? I'm very naive.

PROFESSOR

Primitive?

MALE STUDENT

Proud of it.

FEMALE STUDENT

What?

PROFESSOR AND MALE STUDENT

Both.

*(They both collapse to the floor, moaning, "Oh, yeah!" An electronic tone rises, and the **FEMALE STUDENT** sits in the chair as a white screen is slid in behind it, giving it the aspect of a throne)*

FEMALE STUDENT

Better sit in this, gentlemen.

PROFESSOR

(Rising from the floor)

Why?

FEMALE STUDENT

Well, it's a very electric chair.

(She rises from the chair and attaches electric cables to its arms)

PROFESSOR

I don't want to be electrocuted, madam.

MALE STUDENT

I don't want to be electrocuted either.

FEMALE STUDENT

Do you see wires?

PROFESSOR

(Turning away)

There are so many things about these "oh-so-desirable women" I can't justify to myself —

FEMALE STUDENT

You like my company, admit it.

(The "busy gnome" music is rising)

MALE STUDENT

True, you like the aggravation, Professor. It energizes.

PROFESSOR

I like that, but I don't like its source, I like its results.

FEMALE STUDENT

It's the same thing.

MALE STUDENT

It's the same thing, Professor.

FEMALE STUDENT

Pleasant dreams, Professor.

*(She and the **MALE STUDENT** run to bookshelves and rip pieces of paper to pieces, throwing them into the air like confetti, as the music rises, along with the voice on the tape repeating, "Remarkable people never depend on self-revelation")*

PROFESSOR

I need lots of sleep!

*(He takes papers from his briefcase and throws them into the air, as **GNOMES** run in to retrieve them, and music and talk all start overlapping in a jumble of sound as the lights grow dim)*

FEMALE STUDENT

No problem — it's as if a curtain were rising.

MALE STUDENT

Imagine a play called "The Pretend Hat." What could happen —

PROFESSOR

(Overlapping, as he throws his papers)

I'm imagining a play called "Mysteries of Arrogance." That's more my style!

FEMALE STUDENT

Guess!

PROFESSOR

What's a guess?

FEMALE STUDENT

Time will tell!

PROFESSOR

Quite!

FEMALE STUDENT

Counting on internal time, Professor?

PROFESSOR

I turn into somebody who opens his mouth, and whatever comes out travels in desirable directions only!

*(He has run up against a blackboard, and with the sound of that collision, things quiet down and the **GNOMES** run from the room. All that is heard now is an electronic tone. The **PROFESSOR** turns from the blackboard to face the **FEMALE STUDENT**, who is sitting on the floor on the horse, lighting a cigarette. It seems to be late at night. The **PROFESSOR** speaks quietly)*

Automatic truths, madam.

FEMALE STUDENT

Good. What's the technique?

PROFESSOR

(A pause, then he decides to reveal his secret)

Well, I make up rhymes.

FEMALE STUDENT

Then what?

PROFESSOR

The technique is, they don't rhyme.

FEMALE STUDENT

Really, Professor!

(Now there is complete silence)

PROFESSOR

This is supposed to illustrate something.

FEMALE STUDENT

*(Rising from the floor. The **MALE STUDENT** stands next to the **PROFESSOR**, holding out a man's felt hat)*

Ah, your method is the illustrative method.

PROFESSOR

Yes.

FEMALE STUDENT

You make up rhymes that don't rhyme.

PROFESSOR

Not quite. I make up rhymes. I do that. But: they don't rhyme.

FEMALE STUDENT

(After a pause)

I appreciate the difference.

PROFESSOR

Do you?

FEMALE STUDENT

*(She takes the felt hat from the **MALE STUDENT** and places it on her closed fist. At the same time, the **PROFESSOR** removes his feather headdress)*

Here is my hat. What do you think of that?

PROFESSOR

That rhymes.

FEMALE STUDENT

(The childlike tune on the piano returns)

Oh. I thought perhaps you'd say to me, That doesn't rhyme.

PROFESSOR

(He thinks)

But it does. "Here is my hat —

(He turns to erase the already erased blackboard, and she throws the hat to the floor)

What do you think of that."

FEMALE STUDENT

Wait a minute. Does that rhyme?

PROFESSOR

We'll have to find out.

FEMALE STUDENT

How?

PROFESSOR

Over the course of time.

*(He continues to erase, and the **MALE STUDENT** steps forward)*

MALE STUDENT

How many people really attend your lecture courses?

PROFESSOR

(Turning to him in irritation)

Look —!

(Embarrassed to answer, he turns away)

It varies.

MALE STUDENT

Sure.

FEMALE STUDENT

Sure.

MALE STUDENT

But in general, how many?

PROFESSOR

(Very quietly)

Not many.

FEMALE STUDENT

Come on, how many?

PROFESSOR

Sometimes one. Sometimes two, or three.

*(He has crossed the room despondently, just as the **MALE STUDENT** is reaching for some books on a high shelf, but accidently on purpose makes them tumble to the floor)*

MALE STUDENT

Oh, Jeeze, I'm sorry — another accident.

PROFESSOR

On purpose?

MALE STUDENT

Hey, you know the esteem in which I hold you.

PROFESSOR

(Sarcastically)

Yeah.

MALE STUDENT

(As the electronic tone returns)

Therefore the fact that your lectures are not well attended does not, in my eyes, reflect upon you in the least, but rather upon your students.

*(The **FEMALE STUDENT** is quietly rolling the wooden cart into the light. She climbs in, puts her knee up on the railing, studying the **PROFESSOR** from a provocative pose)*

PROFESSOR

You mean, on the ones not totally present.

MALE STUDENT

Possibly those also.

PROFESSOR

But of course — you have no way to know — the quality of those who do attend with regularity.

MALE STUDENT

No.

PROFESSOR

I invite you, Professor.

*(He is staring at the **FEMALE STUDENT**)*

MALE STUDENT

That's impossible.

PROFESSOR

*(He backs away from the **FEMALE STUDENT**)*

My feeling is, the universe uses me as it will.

(He stumbles over the horse and falls to the floor, then looks up in awe)

Jesus, did I just rhyme?

MALE AND FEMALE STUDENT

(Quietly)

Oh yeah . . .!

PROFESSOR

It's hard to know, but I think it rhymed with something.

MALE STUDENT

I don't think so.

*(The **PROFESSOR** moves to the rear, where he is illuminated by light coming from the next room, and begins talking to himself)*

PROFESSOR

In a certain play entitled "My Head Was a Sledgehammer," a certain character falls deeply in love with his mirror image, although his mirror image doesn't resemble him in many important ways.

*(He moves slowly back toward the cart, to gaze at the **FEMALE STUDENT**)*

But is a much more beautiful image. A magic mirror, and the character who has so fallen in love says things that seem beside the point, not expressing love really, but do they?

MALE STUDENT

(From the shadows at the side of the room)

Do they what?

PROFESSOR

Do they win him the love of women?

MALE STUDENT

Women in general?

(The lights have risen, and are bright again)

FEMALE STUDENT

Be more specific.

PROFESSOR

*(He runs to erase an already erased blackboard and the words pour rapidly out of him, as the two **STUDENTS***

*reach up and make books tumble from high shelves, and a **GNOME** rolls the cart around the room)*

You see what's happening to me? I've been placed in a situation where verbal disorganization — while it does not rule — has been dreamed of deeply by certain individuals who vibrate on the edge of an aura that does

divide a particular arena into those who are beautiful and those who are simply pieces of shit.

FEMALE STUDENT

But Professor, isn't that a false distinction?

PROFESSOR

No longer true, madam.

FEMALE STUDENT

Look at ME —?

PROFESSOR

Once again the goddamned philosophers have undone me.

MALE STUDENT

Does this implicate every single one of them?

PROFESSOR

Correct. Every single one of you has cheated me out of my appropriate energies.

MALE STUDENT

Oh, gee. Which of those sons of bitches have done this to you, Professor?

PROFESSOR

I don't know individual names.

MALE STUDENT

Uh-uh! The truth, Professor.

PROFESSOR

Hey —!

*(Ominous music begins, and the **PROFESSOR** mutters to himself)*

I want it to pour forth abundantly.

MALE STUDENT

What stops you, Professor?

PROFESSOR

Can truth travel between two people? I think not.

FEMALE STUDENT

How come?

*(The **MALE STUDENT** is poised at the blackboard, ready to take notes)*

PROFESSOR

This I can explain. But don't confuse, please, my explanation with the truth.

FEMALE STUDENT

Explain!

*(The **PROFESSOR** runs to his briefcase, takes out a stack of paper, and throws sheets of it into the air. The **GNOMES** pick up pieces of paper and run to the walls, holding the paper flat against the walls as high as their arms can reach)*

PROFESSOR

If the truth is the truth about something —

MALE STUDENT

— But it has to be about SOMETHING!

PROFESSOR

But: that thing it's the truth about — eats it!

MALE AND FEMALE STUDENT

Huhhhh?

*(The **GNOMES** pull away from the walls to watch in disbelief)*

PROFESSOR

And the truth — eaten — disappears by turning into whatever it is that eats it.

MALE AND FEMALE STUDENT

(Hitting their foreheads in recognition)

Ahhhh!

*(The **GNOMES** run out of the room)*

PROFESSOR

In order to clarify this, I shall now tear to pieces an important envelope, within which —

*(The cabinet rolls in quickly. The **PROFESSOR** runs to it, takes out an envelope and opens it and reads a piece of paper, which he then tears to pieces and throws into the air like confetti)*

I forgot what was in the envelope. But that's okay — because it illustrates my real and most secret import.

FEMALE STUDENT

(Rubbing her body up against him)

I don't know how to say this, Professor. But what you just did really turns me on.

PROFESSOR

Not really?

FEMALE STUDENT

Really.

*(The **MALE STUDENT** has also come to cuddle up against the **PROFESSOR**)*

PROFESSOR

You're not lying to me?

FEMALE STUDENT

Truth is — I'm not lying.

*(Irritated, the **PROFESSOR** slaps the **MALE STUDENT** to make him back off. Then he runs to a bookcase and tears up more paper, which he throws into the air)*

PROFESSOR

How could I possibly know who's lying?

(A doorbell rings)

FEMALE STUDENT

My God, that must be me.

PROFESSOR

(Calls out, as lively dance music is beginning)

Just a minute!

*(Both he and the **MALE STUDENT** find more paper to tear up and throw into the air. As it floats down, they shake hands, then bump shoulders and go into the dance they have already performed where they use their hands in a pumping motion, swing their hips in place, and then do aggressive breast strokes as they strut around the stage. The **FEMALE STUDENT** picks up the horse, holds it between her legs, and tries to ride the horse across the stage in time to the music. Then she falls with a scream)*

FEMALE STUDENT

Why did you make me do this, Professor?

PROFESSOR

(As the dance stops)

I don't know of course.

FEMALE STUDENT

Intuition?

PROFESSOR

I can't say it was intuition.

*(The dance recommences minus the **FEMALE STUDENT**, as two **GNOMES** enter carrying a giant white envelope high in the air, marching in time to the music. The **MALE STUDENT** breaks from the dance to grab a small envelope attached to the big one and stares at it, as the dance music gives way to a return of the childlike piano tune and the big envelope is carried off)*

MALE STUDENT

Hey, what can you say about what you've been doing since you came into this room, Professor?

PROFESSOR

Theorize about it? Spare me —

MALE STUDENT

I'm afraid there's no other option, Professor.

(He holds the small envelope to his own forehead)

Close your eyes!

FEMALE STUDENT

What a shame, Professor.

(She is crossing the room carrying an egg she holds over a mixing bowl)

You haven't produced the desirable egg. And your heart, Professor, which was never whole, breaks —

*(She breaks the egg into the bowl, as the **MALE STUDENT**, who has torn his envelope to pieces, throws it into the air)*

MALE STUDENT

Hey, what effect is this having on you, Professor?

PROFESSOR

Remarkable enough, it brings tears to my eyes.

MALE STUDENT

Genuine magic?

FEMALE STUDENT

No tears visible. He makes you believe in them simply by his tone of voice.

(She runs to his side)

PROFESSOR

Are you threatening to saw me in half, madam?

MALE STUDENT

She doesn't know how to do that without hurting you, Professor.

PROFESSOR

Try hurting me. Go ahead, twist something.

(Each twists one of his arms, and he grunts in pain)

Now I'm feeling a little pain. Though it would be more poignant doing this in public.

*(They twist him around and slam him into a blackboard, as the **VOICE** on tape is heard repeating again and again, "Remarkable people never depend on self-revelation" softly through the following conversation)*

What am I able to perceive, even through tears of pain?

MALE STUDENT

Bypass the tears, move to the ears.

PROFESSOR

What's happening?

MALE STUDENT

Oh, it hasn't happened Professor, so that's why it's still interesting.

PROFESSOR

What is?

MALE STUDENT

Well, you've been crying.

(A music of anticipation is heard)

PROFESSOR

Nobody noticed —

FEMALE STUDENT

Don't believe him. He was crying real tears.

MALE STUDENT

That's what I thought —

PROFESSOR

Don't believe it —

(The cabinet rolls quickly into the room and he runs up to it)

My next trick? This book disappears.

(He takes out a book and holds it up in the air)

MALE STUDENT

Was the drawer empty?

PROFESSOR

Careful. I make things appear out of nothing.

*(He throws the book back into the cabinet, and he and the **MALE***

***STUDENT** circle each other with their hands up in the air as if to say, "Nothing up my sleeve")*

MALE STUDENT

Bravo, Professor!

PROFESSOR

Thank you, Professor!

(They run toward each other, and just before they collide, fall suddenly on their knees and roll away from each other. Then they fall back exhausted onto the floor)

MALE STUDENT

Now, tell me, Professor, why do you prefer the disappearing act to the opposite?

PROFESSOR

That takes some explaining —

FEMALE STUDENT

Both kneel for this.

PROFESSOR

(Rising)

Unnecessary.

FEMALE STUDENT

I assume you both kneel for this, more than once, please.

PROFESSOR

(Muttering to himself)

Perhaps I have been waiting to enter this very arena.

*(The **FEMALE STUDENT** takes a stack of books from the bookcase, turns back to the **PROFESSOR**, and deliberately throws the books onto the floor. At the moment of impact, the **PROFESSOR** and the **MALE STUDENT** hold their heads and collapse slowly, moaning, "Oh, yeah!")*

FEMALE STUDENT

Should I repeat myself?

MALE STUDENT

Does she mean repeating myself even when I don't remember?

FEMALE STUDENT

Everybody — out of this room, please!

MALE STUDENT

What did I say?

FEMALE STUDENT

(Momentarily perplexed)

If I say everybody — am I included?

MALE STUDENT

Do it! Do it immediately, please.

*(The **FEMALE STUDENT** runs out of the room and the **MALE STUDENT** comes forward on his hands and knees, unaware of the **PROFESSOR** behind him)*

Now that I can't see anybody because they left the room, I can't see anybody, because they left the room.

PROFESSOR

Amazing, sir.

MALE STUDENT

Huh?

PROFESSOR

Your reality is my own reality.

MALE STUDENT

If that's true —?

PROFESSOR

A particular friend helped me out of an impasse.

MALE STUDENT

How?

PROFESSOR

He, or she, blocked all my escape routes.

*(The **MALE STUDENT** turns to get away but bumps into a wall and spins off against a blackboard, as an electronic tone rises)*

MALE STUDENT

But was it a he or a she?

PROFESSOR

I can't possibly remember.

MALE STUDENT

The truth, Professor —

PROFESSOR

That's what I meant from the beginning. I can't remember!

*(The tone rises momentarily, as the pink disk rolls in, and entering with it, and posing in front of it, is the **FEMALE STUDENT**, who is now wearing an exotic bright red shoe on one foot)*

FEMALE STUDENT

What changed the minute I left the room, Professor? Come on, tell me what's radically different.

MALE STUDENT

It always happens like this. As soon as someone asks me, What's radically different, if I fail to notice what's radically different, I find myself in very deep shit.

PROFESSOR

I find myself in very deep shit, Professor.

FEMALE STUDENT

Finally, somebody noticed.

PROFESSOR

What was noticed?

FEMALE STUDENT

I bought new shoes, Professor.

(She grabs a leg of the horse, swings it around, and positions herself with one foot displayed on the horse's rump)

Or — at least one.

MALE STUDENT

Jesus Christ, the one thing I failed to notice was an individual shoe!

PROFESSOR

I think we're both in deep shit, Professor.

FEMALE STUDENT

Dizzy? Me too.

*(She runs excitedly forward and spins herself, then screams and falls, as the **GNOMES** enter and pull strings from the wall and dangle the little balls over the floor near her body)*

PROFESSOR

This is too much. The angel who dominated my life turns human, but do I believe it?

FEMALE STUDENT

I bought new shoes, Professor, that's all.

PROFESSOR

Why? Of all possibilities —?

FEMALE STUDENT

Simple. To get back down to earth.

(*Ominous music plays softly*)

PROFESSOR

Run that by me again.

FEMALE STUDENT

(*Rising from the floor*)

Careful, Professor. When I pick up speed, I pick up more than speed.

PROFESSOR

Does it really look like I'm about to gravitate toward whatever pulls me in directions I'm totally incapable of traveling?

FEMALE STUDENT

(*Trying to figure things out*)

The only thing I can come up with: Somebody must have had God in mind — remember him? — when he went down on his hands and knees in front of me.

MALE STUDENT

That was last night, madam.

(*Going down on his hands and knees before her*)

But here we have a whole new beginning.

FEMALE STUDENT

I don't see the difference.

PROFESSOR

(*Also going down on all fours*)

Here's the difference.

FEMALE STUDENT

(*Circling the two men, as the* ***GNOMES*** *sneak out of the room*)

Right again, Professor. The effect is totally different.

PROFESSOR

Continue, please.

FEMALE STUDENT

Well, the word that comes to mind immediately is . . .

(*She thinks for a while*)

Literature?

PROFESSOR

Stop groping for respectability, madam.

FEMALE STUDENT

I was doing the opposite, Professor. If I say "literature," that's like saying "shit."

(*The **GNOMES** enter*,

tearing pages from books and scattering them over the floor)

Whereas if I started rolling my tongue over an objective word like "science"? Well, that's sweet enough to plunge somebody like me into those nether regions where pigs do fly, Professor.

PROFESSOR

Strange, to me science has no particular aroma.

(*The **FEMALE STUDENT** kicks his behind, and he jumps up from the floor*)

Ow! Why did you do that?

FEMALE STUDENT

Figure it out, my friend.

(*He comes down to her and looks into her eyes*)

PROFESSOR

I'm your friend no longer, madam.

(*He goes, but she grabs his arm to stop him, as a **GNOME** is rolling out a thin red carpet diagonally across the floor, and sad violin music is heard*)

FEMALE STUDENT

No longer the friend of science?

(*He pulls away and leaves the room*)

I must have fallen prey to the unenviable error of being reticent when it comes to putting my best foot forward.

(*The **MALE STUDENT** has picked up the horse and carries it down to her*)

MALE STUDENT

Maybe it's time to try genuine role reversal?

FEMALE STUDENT

Just as an experiment?

MALE STUDENT

Look at it this way. If it's an experiment, we can pretend nobody really gets hurt.

(*He throws her the horse, which she catches in her arms, as the pink disk rolls out of the room and is simultaneously replaced by the cabinet, which now offers a display of shoes. The* ***MALE STUDENT*** *selects a pair with red apples attached to the tips of the toes. He sits on the floor putting them on*)

FEMALE STUDENT

Inconclusive. This is inconclusive.

(*She throws away the horse, as the childlike piano tune returns*)

MALE STUDENT

(*Standing up and looking sadly at his shoes*)

As a matter of fact, this is inconclusive.

FEMALE STUDENT

(*Joining him in contemplation*)

But it still counts. Because our agreement is — it's inconclusive.

(*She runs back to grab the horse, pulls it along the red carpet to one end, and sits down on top of it, as the* ***MALE STUDENT*** *lifts the apples off his shoes and studies them*)

MALE STUDENT

That reminds me —

FEMALE STUDENT

What?

(*Two* ***GNOMES*** *have appeared and are kneeling, each holding out a loaf of french bread toward the* ***MALE STUDENT****. Each bread has a little napkin draped over its middle*)

MALE STUDENT

(*Backing away from the bread*)

Wait a minute. Am I being asked to invent something?

(*He reaches for a book on a high shelf, perhaps to research some important invention, but he accidently tumbles books down over himself. At the same moment the* ***GNOMES*** *are permanently fixing an erect french bread on the toe of each of his shoes. The tiny napkins now delicately cover the upright tips of the bread. The* ***MALE STUDENT*** *takes a few tentative steps, studying the bread that rises from his feet*)

MALE STUDENT

You're not going to believe this.

FEMALE STUDENT

Try me, Professor.

MALE STUDENT

This might not be an appropriate moment, but —

(*He bends toward the bread*)

— I'm really hungry!

FEMALE STUDENT

Ah, just like Professor Number One, Professor Number Two, Number Three, Number Four, Number Five, Number Six —

MALE STUDENT

Wait a minute.

FEMALE STUDENT

What are you trying to tell me?

MALE STUDENT

How do I know?

(*He is lifting a bread from one shoe, holding it close to his body so it points out from between his legs toward the* ***FEMALE STUDENT****, who averts her face*)

FEMALE STUDENT

Then how can I share your experience?

MALE STUDENT

Oh, I don't see how it can be avoided.

FEMALE STUDENT

It's being avoided.

MALE STUDENT

Let me show you something.

FEMALE STUDENT

What?

MALE STUDENT

(*He extends the bread a bit more*)

You decide.

FEMALE STUDENT

I choose not to see this.

MALE STUDENT

Ahh —

FEMALE STUDENT

(*Whirls to face him, pointing at the bread*)

I choose not to see this thing.

MALE STUDENT

— I don't imagine this bread appeals to a female professional such as yourself.

FEMALE STUDENT

Of course not. It's much too long.

(*She turns and throws her horse away*)

MALE STUDENT

But. Here's the thing — shorten it.

FEMALE STUDENT

How?

MALE STUDENT

(His eyes glistening)

Hey, use a knife.

FEMALE STUDENT

You do that, please.

(She hides her eyes and runs to a far corner)

MALE STUDENT

With a genuine — knife?

FEMALE STUDENT

With a knife!

MALE STUDENT

(Backing up along the carpet, caressing his bread)

Ah, with a genuine knife?

FEMALE STUDENT

(She grabs the bread from him and throws it away. Ceremonial horns are heard honking)

I said with a knife, because what I intended, was a knife!

*(They both run to the bookcases and throw down even more books, searching for knives, which they find hidden behind the books. They hold them up into the light, which is now intense, and white streamers attached to the knife handles flutter as they move the knives in circles. The music builds and the white hospital screen is rolled into the room by two **GNOMES**. Behind the screen is the **PROFESSOR** in his feather headdress, but he towers above it because he is walking on tall cothurni. The screen pivots around him as he slowly advances, and he is seen supporting himself with a long staff. In his other hand is a knife held high in the air, with streamers falling from its handle. Strapped to his waist is an open book trailing long streamers. The music changes to the childlike piano tune. The **PROFESSOR** advances slowly, his feet weighed down by the cothurni)*

MALE STUDENT

Hey, Professor! Why do you walk that way?

PROFESSOR

(Staring up into the light)

When you get old, Professor — that's what it feels like. So, my God, get used to it, Professor!

*(Two **GNOMES** cause the screen to circle him slowly)*

Because that's what it's going to feel like, when

your head pivots in the direction of all desirable ladies, and you WOBBLE, Professor — you too Professor! And if you don't get ready for that, Professor, you're going to be very, very unhappy!

(The screen is in front of him now, and he cries out, lifting his arms in the air)

Ohhh! Very unhappy!

*(The ominous music becomes deafening, while the **GNOMES** are tearing pieces of paper to bits, which they throw into the air as the **MALE STUDENT** and the **FEMALE STUDENT** run after the floating pieces of paper, trying to stab them with their knives. Then the loud music abruptly stops, and everything is silent, and then a wistful violin is heard, and the **PROFESSOR** lifts his face up over the edge of the hospital screen)*

PROFESSOR

(Very quietly)

See what happens?
Time passes through unchartable waters.
Language proliferates
just so things can be said nobody ever intended.
Then,
they come true.
FEMALE STUDENT

I want to see this.

PROFESSOR

I speak. It comes true.

MALE STUDENT

(Advancing toward the screen)

How, Professor?

PROFESSOR

Pure speed, Professor.

MALE STUDENT

Speed?

PROFESSOR

Jumping fast over every new consideration.

*(He points a finger toward the **FEMALE STUDENT**)*

Bang!
And beyond that — nothing.
Getting there really fast, Professor:
Then, nothing.
MALE STUDENT

Hey, that sounds like skipping even, well, life itself, Professor.

*(He is circling the room as the **GNOMES** slowly remove the screen from around the **PROFESSOR** and install it at the rear of the room, in the shadows, where the **GNOMES** hide behind it)*

PROFESSOR

Right, everything so fast, life is skipped.

(He is proceeding slowly down the red carpet)

Right.

*(From behind the screen, the **GNOMES** throw their hands up in the air. Just their wiggling hands are visible as they shout gleefully, "Wheee!")*

MALE STUDENT

Now, wait a minute, what's achieved if life is simply skipped, Professor?

PROFESSOR

Nothing has to be achieved. That's the beauty of it.

MALE STUDENT

Everything skipped? Then one arrives at nothing, Professor.

*(He gestures toward the **FEMALE STUDENT**, who cracks open an egg over a mixing bowl. Again the **GNOMES** throw up their hands and shout "Wheee!")*

Why is that desirable?

PROFESSOR

I didn't say it was desirable.

MALE STUDENT

Hey! What is it, if it isn't desirable, Professor?

PROFESSOR

Necessary, that's all.

MALE STUDENT

Necessary for what?

PROFESSOR

I don't know. You, you don't know.

*(He lifts his staff and points it toward the **FEMALE STUDENT**)*

She, she, she doesn't know —

*(Music rises as the **MALE STUDENT** and **FEMALE STUDENT** join hands and whirl once as the **GNOMES** shout, "Whee!")*

MALE STUDENT

Then slow down, Professor. Enjoy the ride at least!

*(As the **STUDENTS** come out of their spin, all but the **PROFESSOR** are whirled out of the room. He is left alone in a shaft of light, and he laboriously crosses the room on his cothurni. It is very quiet, just the faraway sound of the childlike piano tune)*

PROFESSOR

(To himself)

Why do you suppose it is that whenever I remember you, you seem very uncomfortable, Professor? While I, after all is said and done, seem perfectly comfortable.

MALE STUDENT

(His voice only, heard over the loudspeakers)

Suppose I left, forever. You'd be bored.

*(Still alone, the **PROFESSOR** looks with anguish to the sky, and spreads his arms, as if pleading for mercy. The **MALE STUDENT** enters slowly, but the **PROFESSOR** doesn't seem to be aware of him)*

You'd be all alone.

PROFESSOR

(Turning slowly to look at him)

It wouldn't matter.

FEMALE STUDENT

(Entering the room)

If you were all alone, that would matter, Professor.

PROFESSOR

Oh no it wouldn't. It wouldn't even be part of my life. Because life — that's not where it's happening, madam. You think it's happening in life: you're wrong, beautiful madam.

FEMALE STUDENT

Well, for instance . . . what other place could it be happening?

PROFESSOR

(He moves laboriously away from her)

No, it's not happening someplace else. It's happening right here. But it's not happening in life.

FEMALE STUDENT

Where is "here," Professor, that isn't in life, please? And if it's not it's someplace else?

PROFESSOR

(Turning on her in irritation)

Well, why don't we just shut up and admit I'm right?

*(The pink disk rolls into the room, hiding the **MALE STUDENT**)*

FEMALE STUDENT

But that means — give up total power over my own mind.

PROFESSOR

Okay. That means powerlessness. Bye-bye, Professor —

*(He points his staff toward the disk, which rolls out of the room, taking the **MALE STUDENT** with it)*

Ah, maybe that's the point.

FEMALE STUDENT

Somebody's mind is a total blank.

PROFESSOR

Ah, isn't that the point, madam?

FEMALE STUDENT

What?

PROFESSOR

(Listening to a strange new music, looking around the entire room)

What is this?

FEMALE STUDENT

Among myriad possibilities, I don't know to what you refer.

PROFESSOR

(As the male student sneaks back into the room)

This is an idea that is not allowed to come into existence.

*(Both the **MALE STUDENT** and **FEMALE STUDENT** slowly sink to the floor, muttering to themselves "Oh yeah . . .!")*

Its power as an idea is not thereby minimized.

(He has turned his back and is slowly walking to the rear wall)

Ohhhhh — it still exerts power.

MALE STUDENT

(From the floor)

Hey . . . what idea is that?

PROFESSOR

(Turning back to them)

This is an idea that doesn't exist. It makes the walls of this room vibrate. And failing to do so, something else writes on my forehead, letter of invisible fire.

MALE STUDENT

What I don't see is the fire.

PROFESSOR

It's invisible fire!

MALE STUDENT

Sorry, Professor — if it's invisible, it's not in life. And if it's not in life, I'm not interested, because I'm here in life.

*(He and the **FEMALE STUDENT** lift their arms and start slowly spinning through the room, as a new music rises)*

So what interests me is here, where I am.

*(He and the **FEMALE STUDENT** meet and tango together for a few steps, then break away from each other and spin to opposite walls as the **PROFESSOR** shouts over the music)*

PROFESSOR

Hey, that's silly, Professor!

FEMALE STUDENT

Why, Professor?

PROFESSOR

Because what's interesting, Professor, is what's there —

*(Pointing his staff at the **MALE STUDENT**)*

— where you are!

MALE STUDENT

Here I am!

PROFESSOR

But —! That you don't know!

MALE STUDENT

Don't know what?

*(A pause, and the **PROFESSOR** turns away)*

PROFESSOR

Where you are.

MALE STUDENT

Ah, but even if I don't know about it, that's still here in life, Professor.

FEMALE STUDENT

Hello again.

PROFESSOR

Once again, very silly.

MALE STUDENT

Do better than that, Professor.

PROFESSOR

(As a pounding music begins to rise, he stomps across the room)

Okay. That's unalterably SILLY, Professor!

MALE AND FEMALE STUDENT

(Collapsing to the floor)

Ohhh yeah . . .

*(The pounding music rises, as the **GNOMES** roll in four large disks with blackboards attached, and begin to frantically erase the blackboards)*

PROFESSOR

— because the most interesting thing about anybody in this room is where you are! That part of where you are that isn't where you think you are!

FEMALE STUDENT

Oh, my God — does that rhyme, Professor?

*(Both **STUDENTS** have run to blackboards and are frantically erasing)*

MALE STUDENT

That's silly.

FEMALE STUDENT

That rhymes!

MALE STUDENT

That's so silly!

PROFESSOR

Now that's REALLY silly —

*(All the others, **GNOMES** included, join hands, shouting, "Wheee!" as they circle once around the professor and then return to their work at the blackboards)*

Then again, if you really think that's silly —?

(He is bellowing through the pounding music when a flash of light makes everyone erasing fall to the ground and then immediately jump up to start erasing again. Then

another flash of light, and again they fall and jump back to work — and through all this chaos the professor is striding across the stage on his cothurni and shouting over the music)

Better think it through again!
From the beginning!
One more time!

(He beats the air with his staff, in rhythm with his invocation)

One more time!
One more time!

*(The others have fallen to the floor one last time, and stay frozen with their legs up in the air, as the **PROFESSOR** swings his staff into the air one last time and doesn't move, as the light suddenly goes out and the music stops)*

THE END